

What is an “Abnormal” Body?

Dr. Emily B. Stanback
Department of English



what is
“normal”?

OED

Oxford English Dictionary
The definitive record of the English language

normal, *adj.* and *n.*

View as: Outline | [Full entry](#)

Pronunciation: Brit.  /'nɔːml/, U.S.  /'nɔrm(ə)l/

Frequency (in current use): ●●●●●●●●

Origin: A borrowing from Latin. **Etymon:** Latin *normālis*.

Etymology: < classical Latin *normālis*... [\(Show More\)](#)

A. *adj.*

I. General uses.

1.

a. Constituting or conforming to a type or standard; regular, usual, typical; ordinary, conventional. (The usual sense.)

b. Of a person: physically and mentally sound; free from any disorder; healthy.

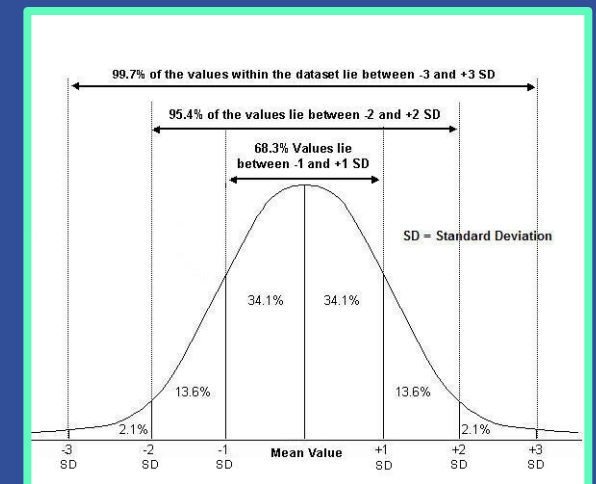
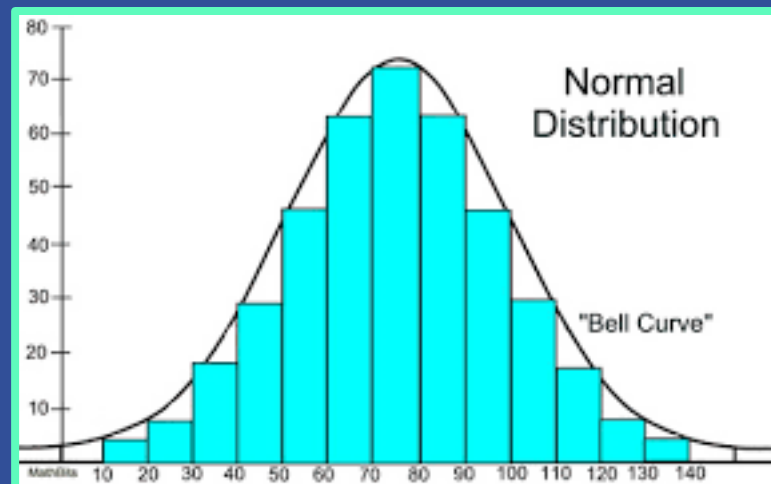
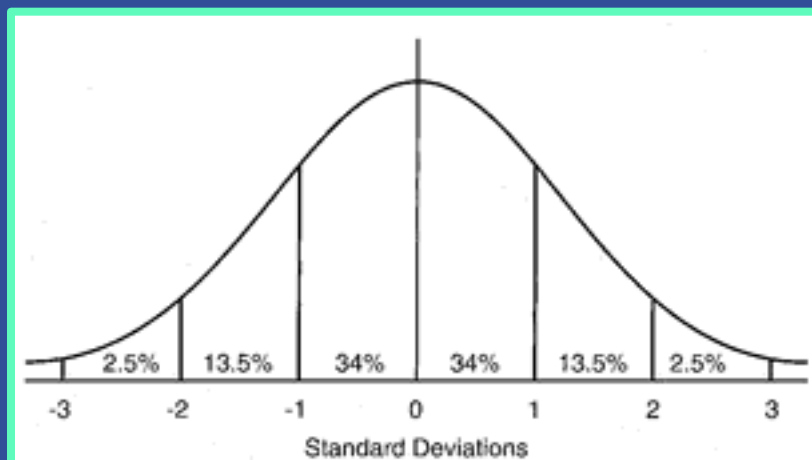
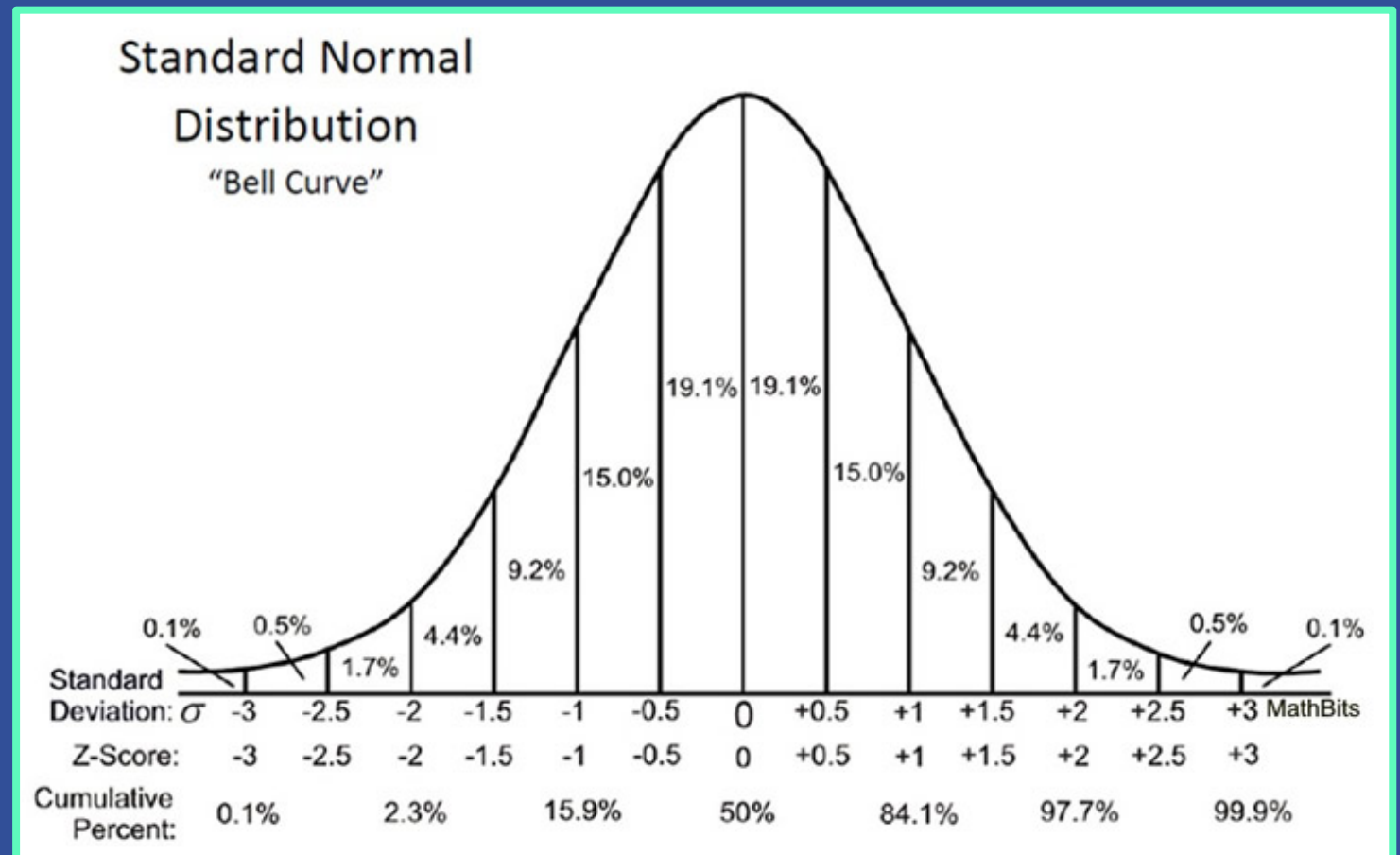
3. A normal variety of something; *esp.* a sound, healthy, or unimpaired person.

4.

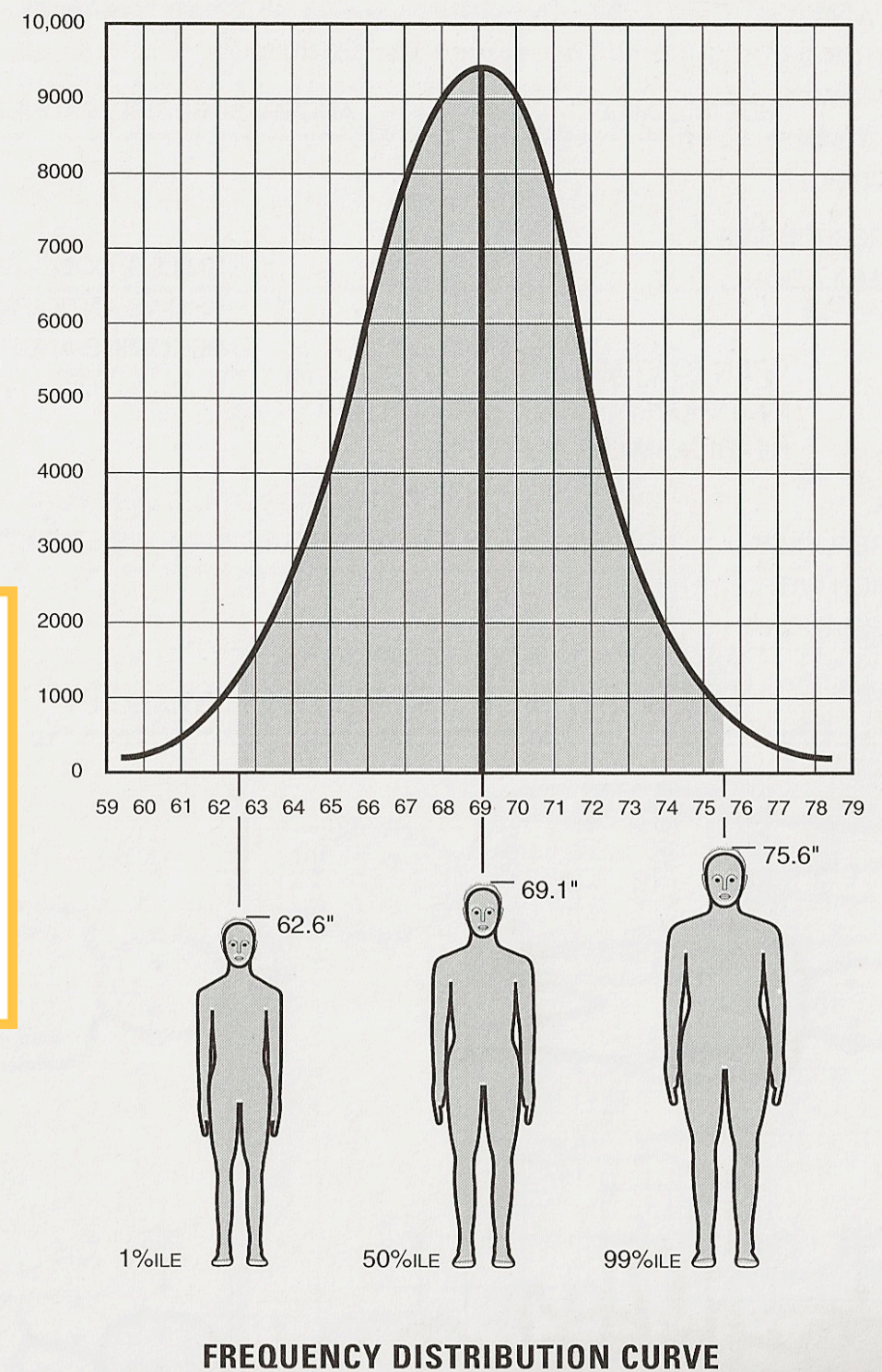
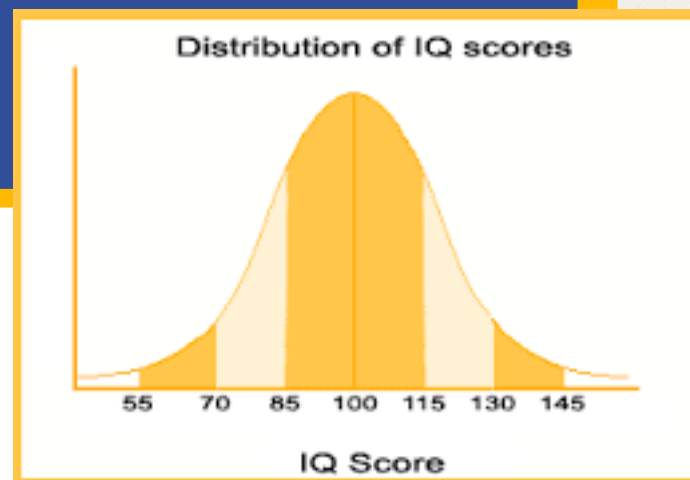
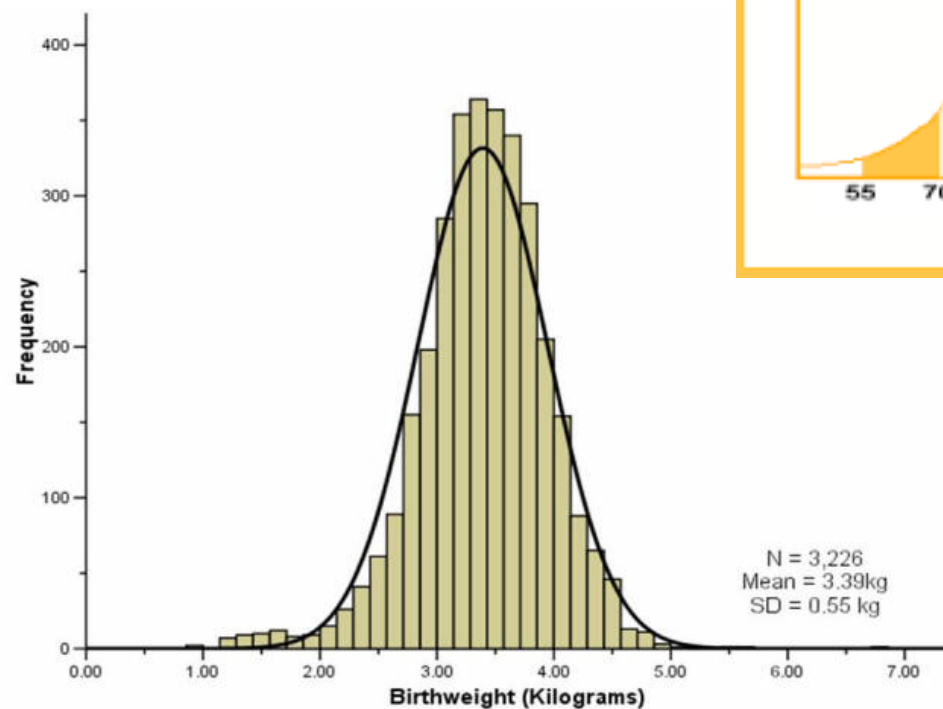
a. The usual or typical state, condition, or value.

“normal distribution”

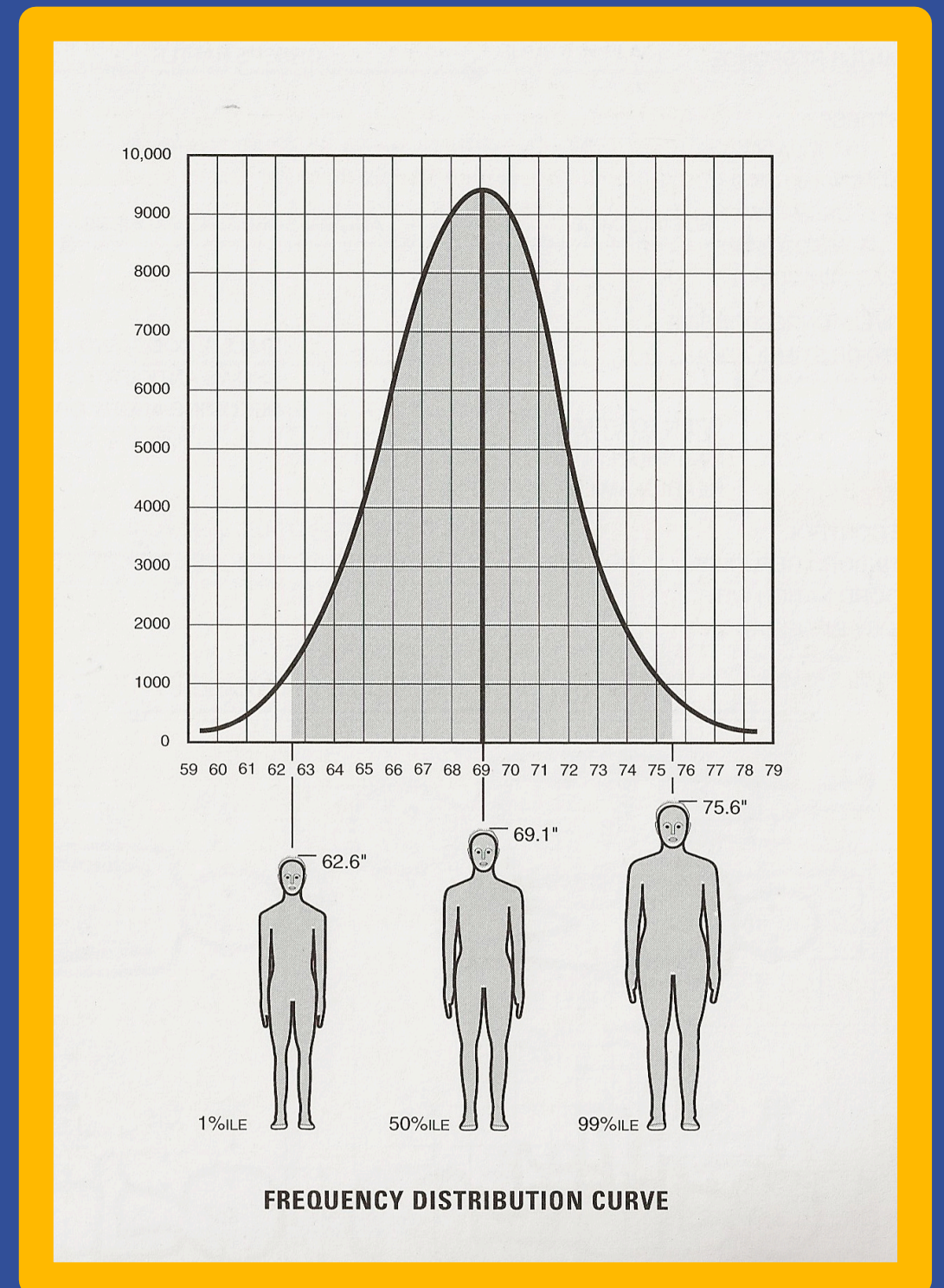
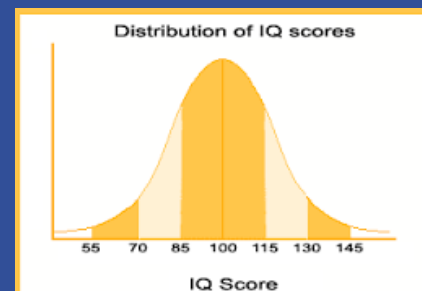
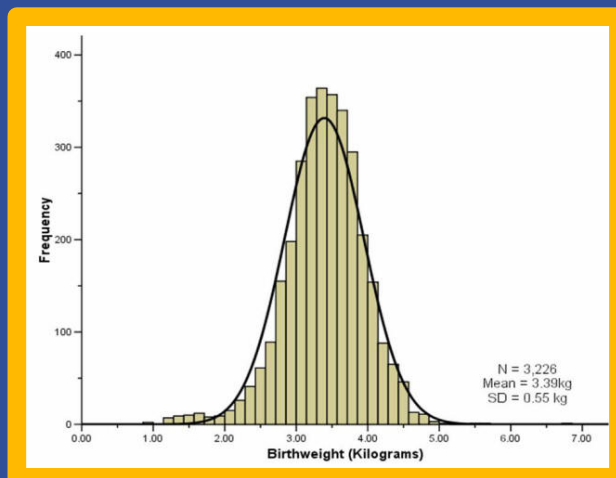
“bell curve”



“normal” as ideal



Compulsory ablebodiedness, Compulsory neurotypicality



Social Model of Disability

non-normative bodily /mental state
+
social construction
=
“disability”

Ways that “disability” is socially constructed, marginalized, & stigmatized:

- *Laws*
- *Educational system / norms*
- *Workplace laws / norms*
- *Stereotypes*
- *Media*
- *Architecture*
- *Behavioral norms*

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the history of
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N.E.D. = *New English Dictionary*

“normal” as perpendicular

II. Technical uses.

5.

a. Right-angled, rectangular. *rare*.

[Thesaurus »](#)

[Categories »](#)

Blount *Glossogr.* (1656) gives ‘*Normal*, right by rule, made by the square or Rule’. This was placed by *N.E.D.* at sense [A. 1a](#), but it seems more likely to belong either to [5b](#).

1650 J. BULWER *Anthropometamorphosis* 55 Those determined by our Barbours the Normal Angles.

1901 L. M. WATERHOUSE *Conduit Wiring* 53 The angle not being (normal) or half-normal bend.

b. Standing, positioned, or directed at right angles (*to*); perpendicular (*to*).

[Thesaurus »](#)

[Categories »](#)

1704 J. HARRIS *Lexicon Technicum* I Normal, the same with Perpendicular, or at Right Angles, and 'tis usually spoken of a Line or a Plane that Intersects another Perpendicularly.

1705 E. SCARBURGH *Eng. Euclide* 15 To which therefore It is said to be a Normal Line.

1858 J. F. W. HERSCHEL *Outl. Astron.* (ed. 5) xiii. 474 The changes of excentricity emergent..from the action of the normal force.

1879 S. NEWCOMB & E. S. HOLDEN *Astron.* 203 The line ZN', perpendicular to HR, and therefore

[Thesaurus »](#)

[Categories »](#)

1. A perpendicular line; a straight line that is at right angles to another line, a tangent to a curve, or a tangent plane to curved surface.

[1704 *Philos. Trans.* (Royal Soc.) **24** 1609 The *Normales* to a right Line and a Circle erected as above..are *ad Locum planum*.]

1728 E. CHAMBERS *Cycl.* at *Subnormal*, The point in the Axis of a Curve, where a Normal or Perpendicular..cuts the Axis.

1798 *Philos. Trans.* (Royal Soc.) **88** 381 The lines so drawn..shall be normals to the parabolas at their intersections with the ellipse.

1816 tr. S. F. Lacroix *Elem. Treat. Differential & Integral Calculus* 81 It is often more convenient..to consider the tangent and the normal, by means of their equation.

1879 W. THOMSON & P. G. TAIT *Treat. Nat. Philos.* (new ed.) I.: Pt. i. §136 The area enclosed on a spherical surface of unit radius by a straight line drawn from its centre, parallel to a normal to the surface.

Physics (ed. 2) v. xli. 689 The plane of this mirror is normal to

Geol. xi. 144 When using such a contact goniometer, place it measured.

nic & Electr. Products July 902/3 Contacts are designed with liable mating with standard J leg chip carriers.

[\(Hide quotations\)](#)

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- 1598 [implied in: A. M. tr. J. Guillemeau *Frenche Chirurg.* 50/2 Thervnto are many thinges required, which I heere normallye and rightlye will prosecute. (at *NORMALLY adv.* 1)].
- 1706 *Eng. Scholar Compl.* 90/2 Normal, exact, according to Rule.
- 1825 *Zool. Jrnl.* 1 405 These three states of genital products require three distinct situations, which in the normal mammifera, are found within the sexual canal.
- 1828 J. STARK *Elements Nat. Hist.* II. 216 Two superior groups, which he denominates normal or typical.
- 1843 R. J. GRAVES *Syst. Clin. Med.* xii. 135 Temperature of the body normal.
- 1860 J. TYNDALL *Glaciers of Alps* I. vii. 54 The veining, whose normal direction would be transverse to the glacier.
- 1881 A. FLINT *Treat. Princ. Med.* (ed. 5) 781 In acute neuritis the nerves are swollen, reddened, and more succulent than normal.
- 1904 J. LONDON *Sea-wolf* xxxvi. 338, I took his pulse. It beat steadily and strong, and was quite normal.
- 1932 E. WAUGH *Black Mischief* iv. 153 Two mail ships..paused for their normal six hours in the little bay.
- 1949 'G. ORWELL' *Nineteen Eighty-four* II. iv. 145 He wondered vaguely whether in the abolished past it had been a normal experience to lie in bed like this.
- 1963 S. PLATH *Bell Jar* xii. 148 What bothered me was that everything about the house seemed normal, although I knew it must be chock-full of crazy people.
- 1995 C. BATEMAN *Cycle of Violence* iv. 64 Screaming and getting on like that, it isn't normal.

4.

a. The usual or typical state, condition, or value.

- 1875 H. C. WOOD *Treat. Therapeutics* (1879) 650 Whenever the bodily temperature falls below normal, pyretic treatment is demanded.
- 1890 *Daily News* 11 Oct. 5/4 It does not require a very strong gale to..raise the level of the Neva three or four feet above its normal.
- 1918 W. L. COWLEY & H. LEVY *Aeronautics* viii. 163 When the aeroplane is just smoothing out from a steep dive..the loading rapidly attains a value which in practice is several times its normal.
- 1940 *Chambers's Techn. Dict.* 605/1 Damage caused by an excess voltage, i.e. a voltage above normal.
- 1966 L. MACNEICE *Coll. Poems* (1979) 304 We are back to daylight When men and plants drink deep. Back to normal; the ghosts in the pinetrees Have dwindled to lizards.
- 1998 *Meat Trades Jrnl.* 13 May 18/1 The systems are designed to continuously monitor critical storage and processing temperatures and warn of any deviation from the normal.

b. Of a person: physically and mentally sound; free from any disorder; healthy.

- 1886 L. MACALISTER tr. E. Ziegler *Text-bk. Pathol. Anat.* III. IX. xcii. 231 When it [sc. the cerebrum] fails to reach the minimum size met with in normal persons the condition is known as micrencephalia.
- 1914 J. JOYCE *Dubliners* xi, The injuries were not sufficient to have caused death in a normal person.
- 1938 *Amer. Home* Oct. 81/2 You arrive home not still all buzzed-up with the day's events, or too tired to think, but a comparatively normal person.
- 1976 *Lancet* 6 Nov. 1031/1 We have looked for differences in the mono-oxidation of phenylalanine between plasma (or serum) from normal persons and patients with P.K.U.
- 1994 *Amer. Spectator* Sept. 60/2 A slight discomfort or slight ailment that wouldn't disturb the normal person at all, to him was of enormous proportions.

3. A normal variety of something; *esp.* a sound, healthy, or unimpaired person.

- 1862 *Atlantic Monthly* Mar. 389 Your Normal schools wun't turn ye into Normals, for it's clear, Ef eddykatin' done the thing, they'd be some skurcer here.
- 1894 W. BATESON *Materials Study Variation* 17 For the belief that such races are descended from the putative normal scarcely ever rests on proof.
- 1908 *Daily Chron.* 14 Oct. 4/4 We might divide them [sc. criminals] into three groups:
—Normals, Juveniles and children; and The degenerate.
- 1916 J. S. HALDANE *Organism & Environment* (1917) iv. 102 The normals of anatomy are not mere physical structures, nor are the normals of physiology mere averages: they are manifestations of the life of an organism regarded as a whole.
- 1940 *Psychol. Bull.* **37** 425 Scales may be successively discovered and standardized on a reservoir sample of normals.
- 1964 M. CRITCHLEY *Developmental Dyslexia* vii. 40 Measuring the reaction time..in normals and in dyslexics.
- 1996 *Ability Network* Spring 26/1 A staff of normals would reside there permanently and tourists could watch in awe as the handicaps are turned over and repositioned as needed.

before “normal” meant
“typical” / “healthy”

before the “norm”
was the ideal

ideal: beauty



Bernini



Michaelangelo

the grotesque



18th–century “health”

Holistic—*considering the whole body, mind, and life*

Individualized—*dependent on each person’s typical state*

The Four Humours

balance / imbalance of

- blood
- black bile
- yellow bile
- phlegm

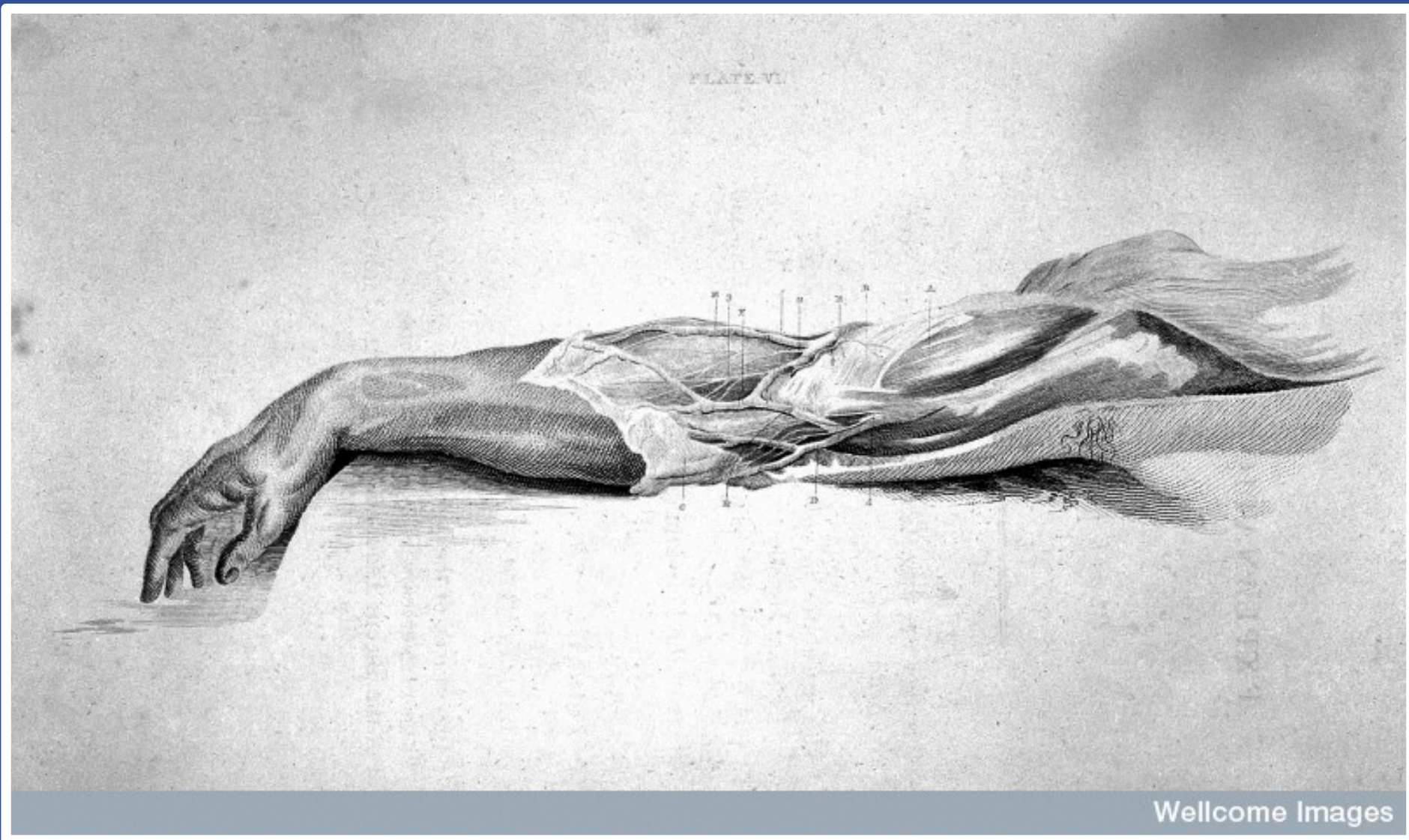
Why did the 19th century
witness the birth of the
“norm”?

what made the “norm” possible

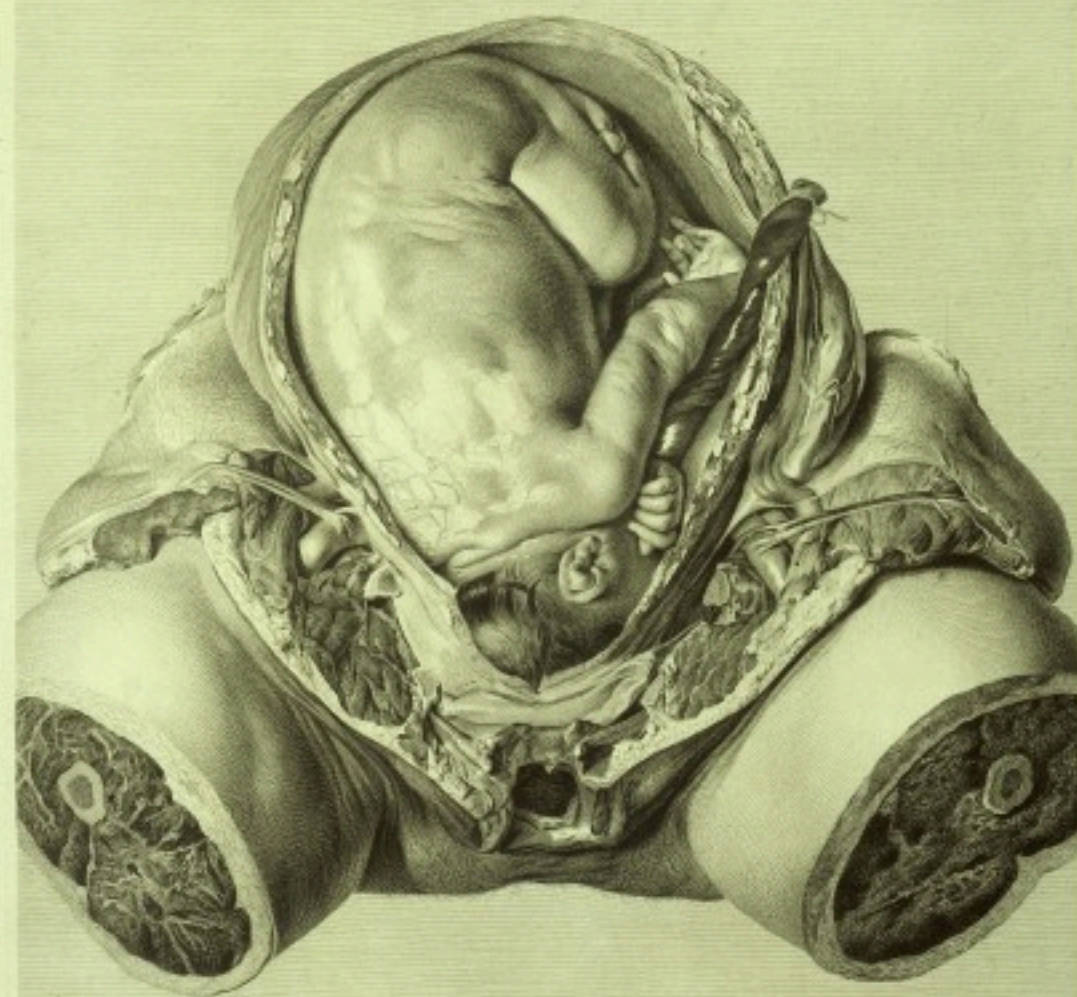
- travel (local / international)
- urbanization
- census
- medical centralization
- medical standardization
- technological advancements

constructing norms
of embodiment

healthy



Wellcome Images



J. G. Kneller del.

TAB. VI. *Fœtus in utero prout a natura positus, rursus omnino parte alteri anteriori,
ac Placenta, et adhærente.*

J. G. Kneller sculp.

Ed. Nov. 1717. p. 171. p. 172.

temporarily unhealthy



Designed by James Dunthorne.

Engraved by T. Rowlandson.

— And feel by turns the bitter change of fierce extremes,

AGUE & FEVER.

Extremes by change more fierce.

Milton.

Pub. as the Act directs March 29 1788. by T. Rowlandson, N° 50 Strand Street.



The Compliments of the Season!!!



The GOUT.

Pub^d May 14th 1799. by H. Humphrey
27 St. James's Street.

“abnormal”



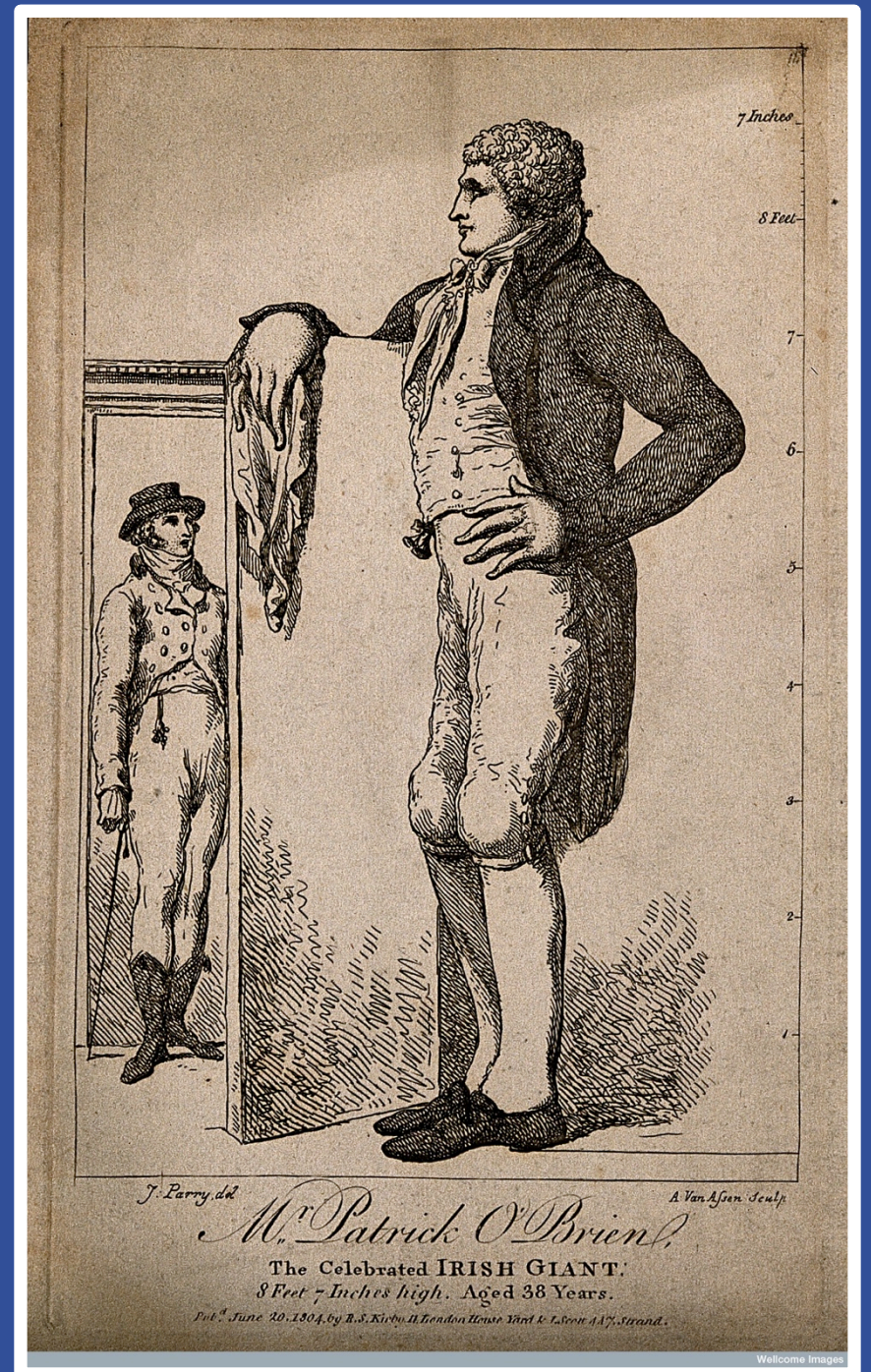
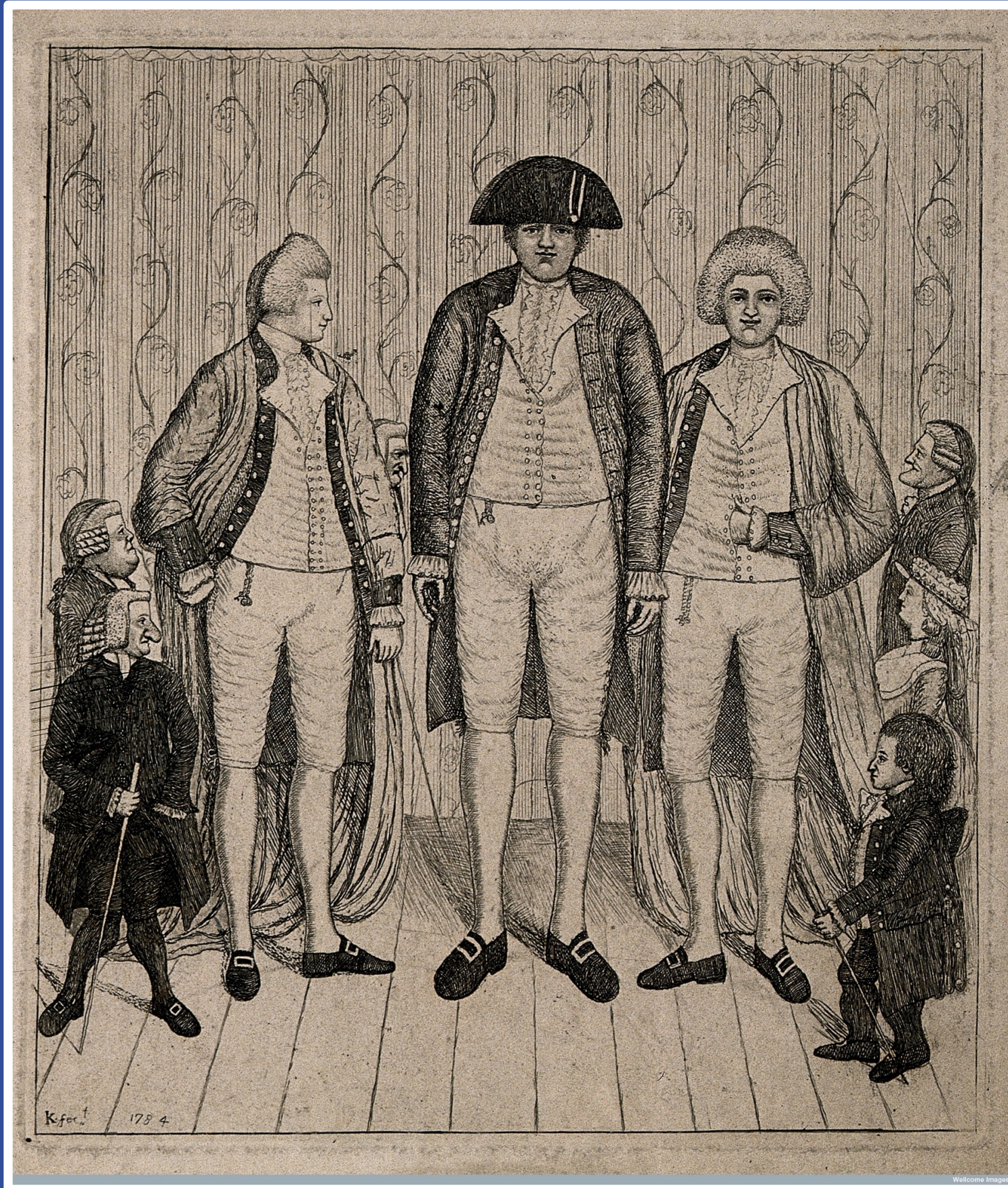
Price One
Shilling Colours

Pub^d October 25th 1810 by Tho^s Tegg N° 111 Cheapside

Rowlandson Del

DROPSY COURTING CONSUMPTION.

“giants”



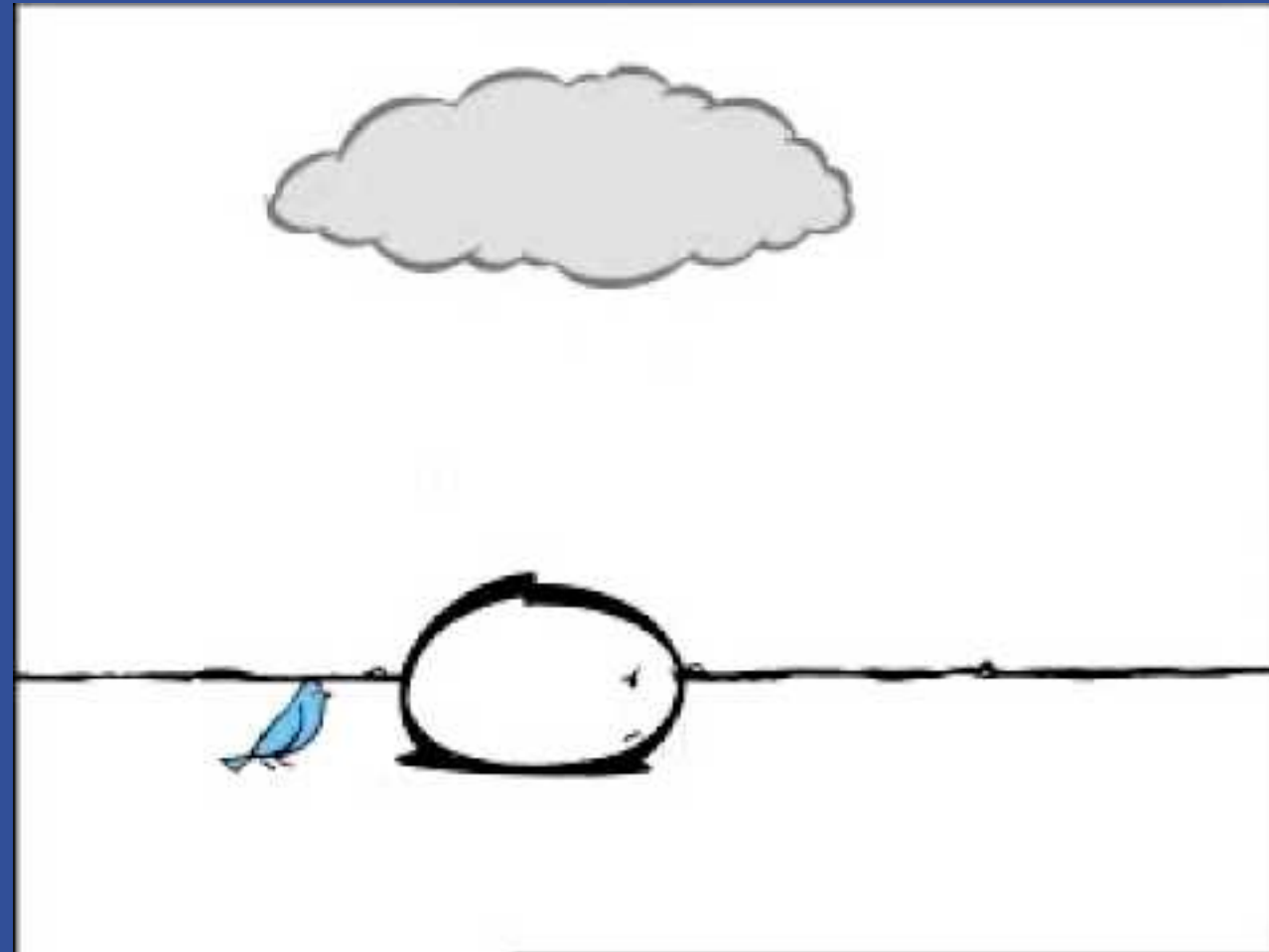
“blind beggars”



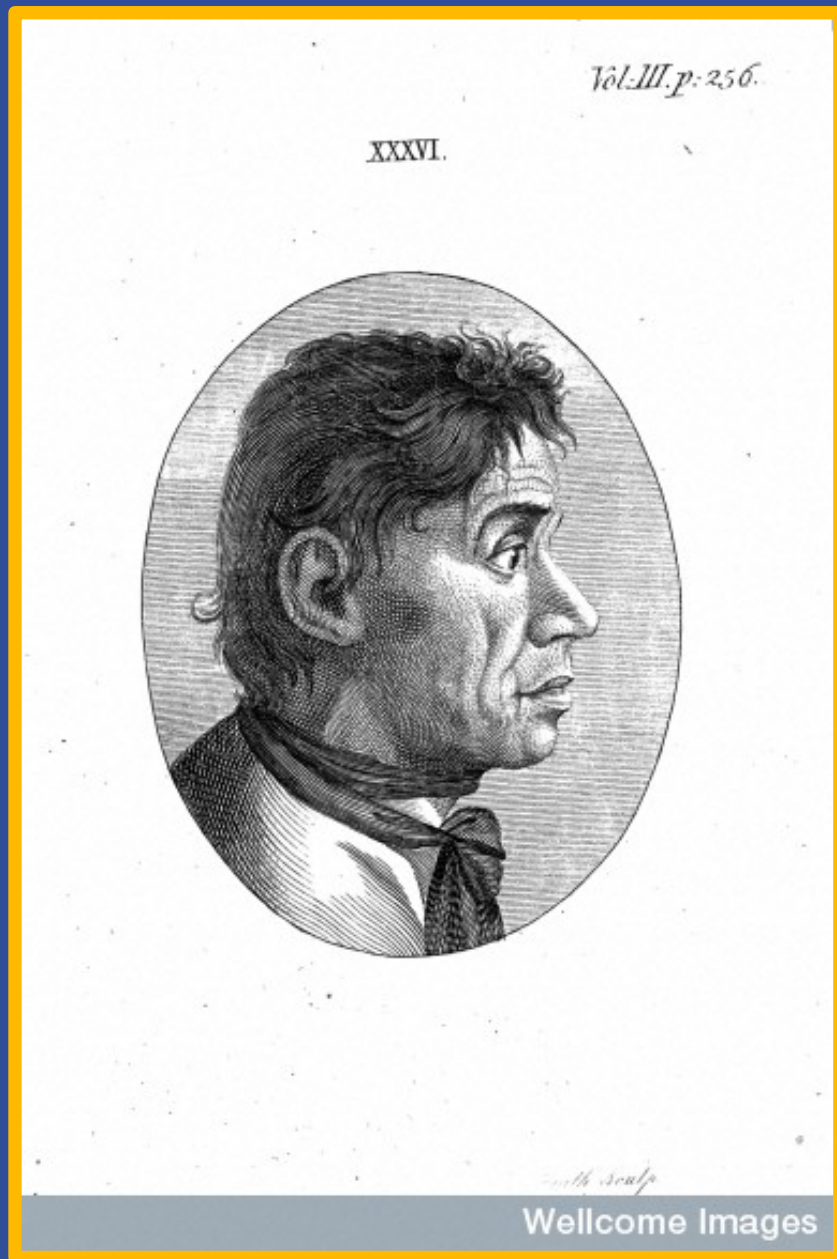




Use as directed.



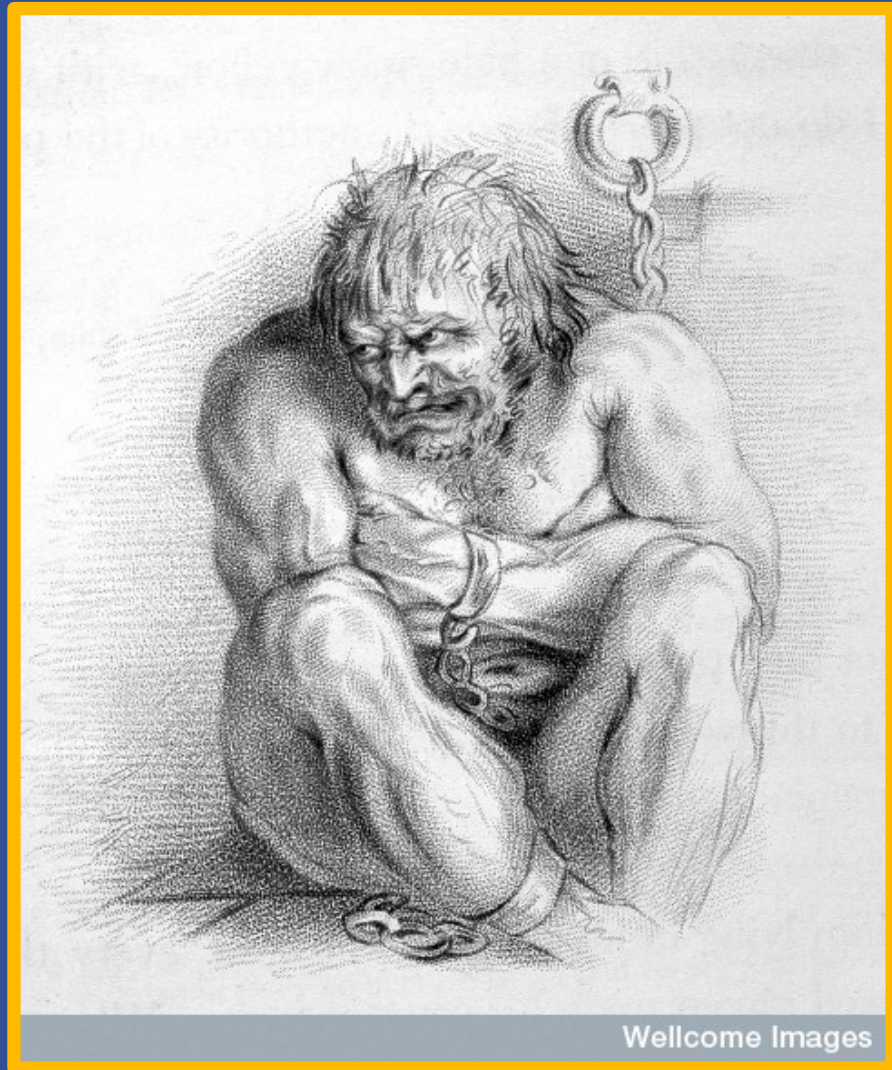
“Idiot”



Johann Kaspar Lavater
Essays on Physiognomy
(1775 – 8)

The mouth and nose of this idiot have not lost the national character, though he is so natively stupid as to be incapable of being taught, or of any unexpected or original thought. There are decisive marks of stupidity not to be instructed in the eyebrows, the vacant eye, the cavity between the forehead and nose, and particularly in the mouth, chin, and neck. I should have discovered folly even in the wrinkles of the cheek.

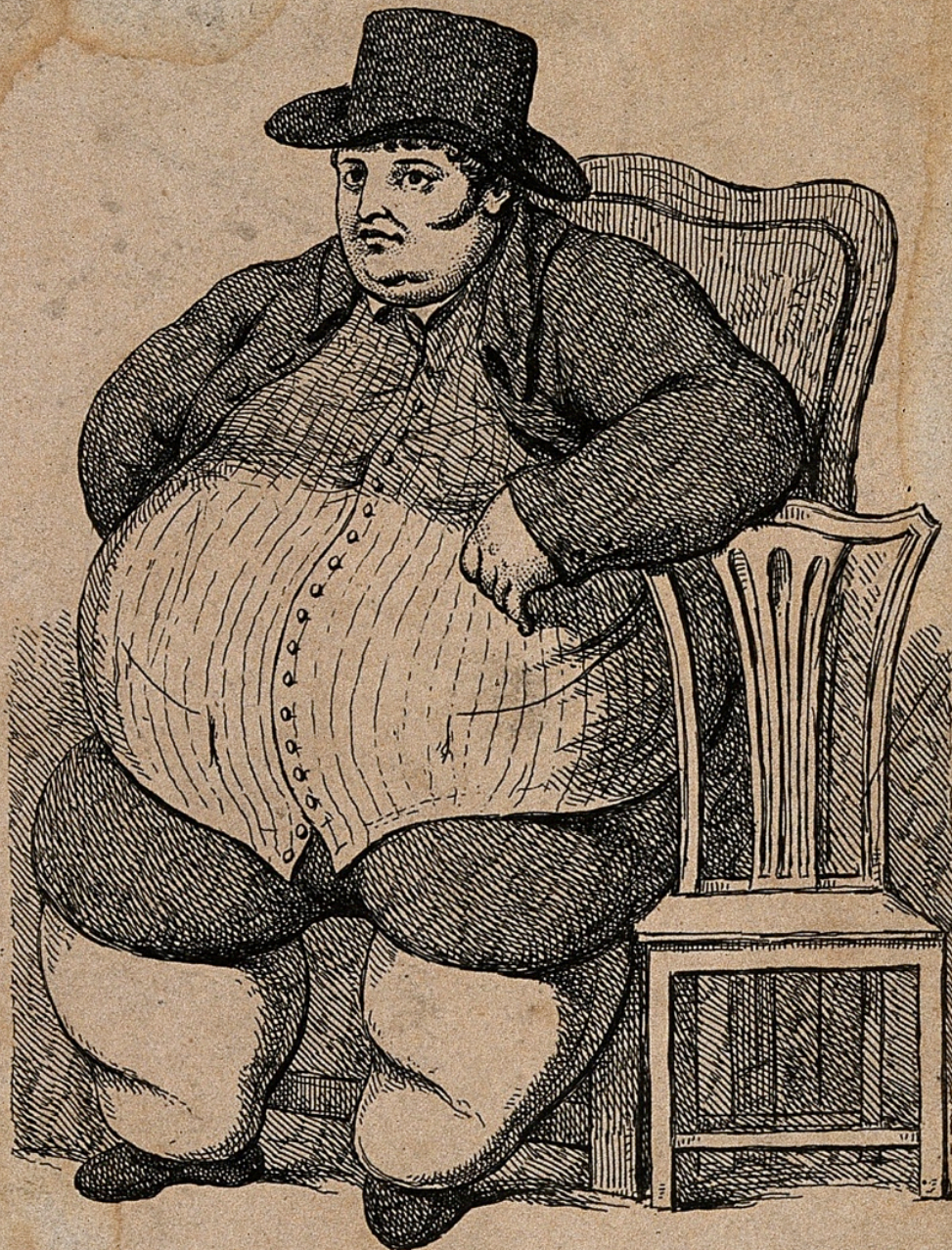
Madness



Charles Bell
*The Anatomy of Expression
in Painting*
(1806)

- There is a vacancy in their laugh, and a want of meaning in their ferociousness
- shrunk posture
- rolling watchful eye
- death-like gloom fixed upon his countenance
- If you watch him in his paroxysm you may see the blood working to his head... Now his inflamed eye is fixed upon you, and his features lighten up into an inexpressible wildness and ferocity.

Daniel Lambert (1770 – 1809)



J. Parry, del.

A. Van der Linde, sculp.

MR DANIEL LAMBERT of Leicester.

Weights 39 Stone 12 Lbs.

Pub^d Aug^t 31, 1804 by R. S. Kirby London House Yard & J. Scott Strand.

FAIRBURN'S ACCURATE PORTRAITS of the TWO most CORPULENT ENGLISHMEN ever known, with a COMPARATIVE ACCOUNT of
their EXTRAORDINARY PERSONS and MANNERS.



MR. DANIEL LAMBERT,
THIRTY-SIX YEARS OF AGE,
WEIGHS upwards of FIFTY STONE, (14 lbs. to the Stone,) or SEVEN HUNDRED and ONE POUNDS,
Measures Three Yards Four Inches round the Body, and One Yard One Inch round the Leg,
FIVE FEET ELEVEN INCHES IN HEIGHT,
AND HAS
NO BLEMISH WHATEVER ON ANY PART OF HIS BODY.

THIS truly astonishing prodigy of human dimensions was born at Leicester, and apprenticed to an engraver and die-sinker. He was of an ordinary size until he attained the age of twenty years, at which time he began gradually to increase in bulk, and has continued so to do until the present time. While under the age of twenty, he accustomed himself to much exercise, both walking and riding, and was frequently in the fields from morning till evening. After the age of twenty, finding himself grow lusty, he took more exercise, with a view to prevent it, but found it of no avail, for, the more exercise he took the more he seemed to increase in size.

Mr. Lambert was never weighed but once, which was in the month of June, 1805: at that time his weight was found to be fifty stone one pound, or seven hundred and one pounds.

This wonderful man enjoys an excellent state of health, and feels himself perfectly at ease, either sitting up or lying in bed; and, although of such an amazing weight, can walk about the room, or up and down the stairs. His diet is plain and the quantity very moderate, for he does not eat more than the generality of men. He drinks neither wines, spirits, or malt liquor, having for the last twelve years drunk water only. He sleeps well, but scarcely so much as other people; and his respiration is as free as that of any moderate-sized person. His countenance is manly and intelligent, he possesses great information, much ready politeness, and manners the most affable and pleasing, with a perfect ease and facility in conversation, of which he is by no means reserved: with those qualifications he fails not to give universal satisfaction, and it is generally acknowledged far exceeds the most sanguine expectations of his visitors.

Mr. Lambert always possessed great muscular strength; when he was about twenty-eight years of age, he once carried upwards of five hundred pounds weight, although he was not used to labor, and never carried a burden but that time: he would, there is no doubt, have been able to have carried a much greater weight, had he been accustomed to labor. His father and mother were both moderate-sized people, as are his two sisters, who are now living. His suits of clothes cost about twenty pounds each, on account of the great quantity of materials they take.

Mr. Lambert has never been married, although he has always been very partial to the female sex. He can sing a good song, is fond of company, and has been a great sportsman, taking great delight in shooting, coursing, cocking, &c. and still enjoys much pleasure in conversing on those subjects.

A short time since, a person, who weighed twenty stone, came to see him; and seemed very much incommenced by his size and weight: after he left him, Mr. Lambert said he would not, if it were possible, (although thirty stone heavier,) change state of body with him for ten thousand pounds. He is much respected by his townsmen at Leicester, which place he left on Saturday, April 4, 1806, in a carriage constructed on purpose for his convenience; and, on his arrival in London, took up his residence at No. 83, Piccadilly, where he sees and converses with company every day, from twelve till five o'clock. Admittance one shilling each.—His stay in London is uncertain, it depending entirely upon circumstances.

An immense number of visitors, among whom are many of the first rank and fashion, flock daily to behold and converse with him.



MR. EDWARD BRIGHT,
Who Weighed FORTY-FOUR STONE, (14 lbs. to the Stone,) or 616 POUNDS.
Measured, round the Chest, (just under the Arms,) 5 Feet 6 Inches; round the Belly, 6 Feet 11 Inches; round the Middle of his Arm, 2 Feet 2 Inches; and round his Leg, 2 Feet 8 Inches;
AND WAS
FIVE FEET NINE INCHES AND A HALF HIGH.

MR. BRIGHT was an eminent grocer at Maldon, in Essex; he was descended from families greatly inclined to corpulency, and was always fat from a child, and yet very strong and active. He always used a great deal of exercise from his boyhood, until the last two or three years of his life. He could walk very well and nimbly too, having great strength of muscles; and frequently rode on horseback, and would sometimes gallop. He went to London about his business until a few years before he died, when the journey of 40 miles became too great a fatigue to him, and he left it off.

At the age of 12 years, he weighed 10 stone 4 pounds, and increased in bulk as he grew up. Before he was 20, he weighed 24 stone. About 13 months before he died, he weighed, *meat weight*, 44 stone, or 616 pounds.—He always had a good appetite and ate heartily, but not more in quantity than those men who are reckoned to have good stomachs.—His drink, when a young man, was ale and old strong beer: he would drink liquors, wine, or punch, at any time, but not to an intoxicating degree. Some years before his death, his chief drink was small beer, of which he drank about a gallon in a day.—He married when he was between 22 and 23 years of age, and had five children born, and left his wife with child of the sixth, near her time. There was an amiable mind in this extraordinary body: he was of a cheerful temper, a kind husband, a tender father, a friendly neighbour, and a fair honest man; so that he was beloved and respected by all who knew him.—He enjoyed good health for the most part of his life, except in the last 2 or 3 years of it, when he was several times seized with an inflammation in his leg, tending towards a mortification; but, by the help of scarification, bleeding, &c. he was soon relieved: his custom was, to have 2 pounds of blood taken away each time he was bled.

He died November 10, 1750, in the 30th year of his age, in a military fever, which lasted 14 days. His coffin measured 3 feet 6 inches over the shoulders, 2 feet 3 inches and 1 at the head, 2 1/2 inches at the feet, and 3 feet 1 inch and 1/2 deep. A way was cut through the wall and staircase, to let the corpse down into the shop. It was drawn to the church on a low-wheeled carriage by men, and was let down into the grave by an engine fixed up in the church for that purpose.—After his death, a wager between Mr. Cold and Mr. Hants, that five men of the age of 21 could be buttoned within his waistcoat, was decided Dec. 1, 1750, at the Black Bull, in Malton, kept by the Widow Day: when not only the five men proposed, but seven men were actually inclosed therein, without breaking a stitch or straining a button.

*Accurate Portraits of the
Two most Corpulent Englishmen
ever known,
with a Comparative Account of their
Extraordinary Persons and Manners*



Daniel Lambert:

- “no blemish whatever on any part of his body”
- “truly astonishing prodigy of human dimensions”
- “of an ordinary size” until the age of twenty
- “enjoys an excellent state of health”
- “partial to the female sex”



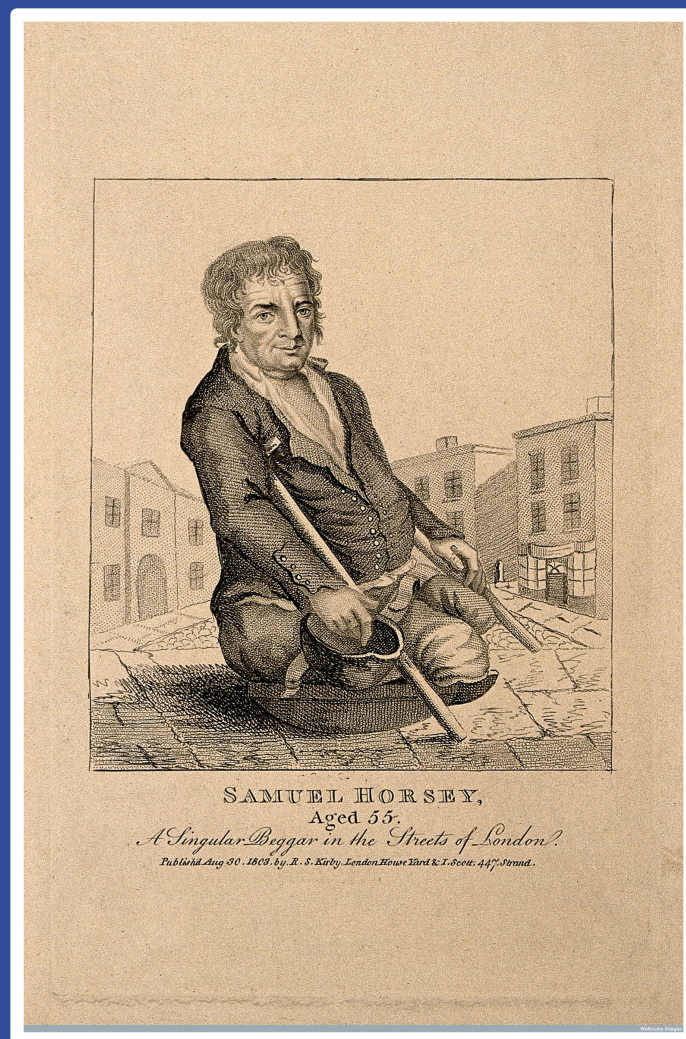
SAMUEL HORSEY,
Aged 55.
A Singular Beggar in the Streets of London?
Published Aug 30. 1803. by R. S. Kirby, London House Yard & T. Scott, 44th Strand.

Samuel Horsey

A Singular Beggar in the Streets of London

Charles Lamb

“A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis”



These dim eyes have in vain explored for some months past a well-known figure, or part of the figure, of a man, who used to glide his comely upper half over the pavements of London, wheeling along with most ingenious celerity upon a machine of wood; a spectacle to natives, to foreigners, and to children.

He was of a robust make, with a florid sailor-like complexion, and his head was bare to the storm and sunshine. He was a natural curiosity, a speculation to the scientific, a prodigy to the simple. The infant would stare at the mighty man brought down to his own level. The common cripple would despise his own pusillanimity, viewing the hale stoutness, and hearty heart, of this half-limbed giant.

He was a grand fragment; as good as an Elgin marble. The nature, which should have recruited his reft legs and thighs, was not lost, but only retired into his upper parts, and he was half a Hercules. I heard a tremendous voice thundering and growling, as before an earthquake, and casting down my eyes, it was this mandrake reviling a steed that had started at his portentous appearance. He seemed to want but his just stature to have rent the offending quadruped in shivers...

Elgin Marbles

“Parthenon Marbles”











He moved on, as if he could have made shift with yet half of the body- portion which was left him. The *os sublime* was not wanting; and he threw out yet a jolly countenance upon the heavens. Forty-and-two years had he driven this out of door trade, and now that his hair is grizzled in the service, but his good spirits no way impaired, because he is not content to exchange his free air and exercise for the restraints of a poor-house, he is expiating his contumacy in one of those houses (ironically christened) of Correction.

“blind beggars”



John Thelwall on Blindness

“Cut off, in his earliest infancy, from all intercourse with the world of knowledge and observation, through the customary inlet, the organ of sight, Mr. Gough has been induced ... to cultivate, with extreme diligence, the supplementary faculties of hearing and of touch. The acute perfection to which the latter of these has been improved and expanded, has been sufficiently demonstrated by the extent to which he has carried his practical researches into the minutiae of the science of botany; and the exquisiteness of his perceptions in the other kind...”

John Thelwall on Blindness

“is it not unlikely that [Milton’s] blindness... might have given an increased portion of that strength, that natural and copious melody, and that variety, to the rhythms and numbers of his divine poem”



“I should have discovered folly even in the wrinkles of the cheek.”

Lavater's “Idiot”

William Wordsworth, 1802 letter to John Wilson

“the conduct of fathers and mothers of the lower classes of society towards idiots [is] the great triumph of the human heart. It is there that we see the strength, disinterestedness, and grandeur of love”

“that sublime expression of scripture that ‘*their* [idiots] *life is hidden with God*’”

William Wordsworth, “The Idiot Boy”

For while they all were travelling home,
Cried Betty, “Tell us, Johnny, do,
Where all this long night you have been,
What you have heard, what you have seen:
And, Johnny, mind you tell us true.”

Now Johnny all night long had heard
The owls in tuneful concert strive;
No doubt too he the moon had seen;
For in the moonlight he had been
From eight o'clock till five.

And thus, to Betty's question, he
Made answer, like a traveller bold,
(His very words I give to you,)
“The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo,
And the sun did shine so cold!”
—Thus answered Johnny in his glory,
And that was all his travel's story.

